/14 cont./

folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager. Their only musical instrument is the achangur, a balalaika, and even this has been borrowed (to judge from the name) from the Grusians (Grusian: chonguri). Abkhaz versification for the most part is governed by alliteration. Examples:

Varvultu --- barfuntu

Chilar marda qulardam

Arba arba sinarba

Masta mastarou

Masta stakhou

Siamul utsa

Siamul siakhou

Siandzhar utsa.

/15/

II.

Home-life of the Abkhaz -- Family -- Position of Women.

The whole domestic life of the Abkhaz is arranged so unpretentiously that all the necessary household articles, with the exception of iron things, are produced by the Abkhaz himself from materials which are at hand. The smith's trade, which requires a certain special technical knowledge, is left in the hands of special craftsmen. In every village there are two or three blacksmiths who will produce anything the Abkhaz needs from a piece of iron which he gives them. The smiths are highly regarded by the community and their craft itself has sacred significance in the eyes of the Abkhaz.

Trading is considered a shameful occupation, and the Abkhaz therefore do not engage in it, but if it were developed, the Abkhaz could sell many things at a profit. For instance, the Abkhaz women, who, by the way, are great masters of all kinds of home crafts, produce from sheep and goat skins the

/52 cont./

2. Ibid., p. 162.

175 764 of Syracuse (who lived about the middle of the fourth century B.C.) said /53/ that "it is not accepted among the Colchians either to bury or to burn the corpses of men. They put these corpses in fresh animal-hides and hang them on trees. They commit to the earth the corpses of women, however, ... They venerate heaven and earth above all" (1).

1. Ibid., p. 208.

20.

Shasha

●326 796 Under the name of Shasha the Abkhaz understand the inventor of the craft of the smith. They say of him, "Shasha khe ah-dou," which means, "Shasha, the great lord of trades." Shasha or Shash was the first blacksmith. He picked up the red-hot iron, not with tongs, but with his hands, and he forged it, not on an anvil, but on his knees. He is the inventor not only of the craft of the smith, but the inventor-patron of 363 other crafts as well. The smithy with all its appurtenances is the image of Shasha (2).

2. Iveriia, 1888, No. 186.

[982] 796 [914] Prayers are offered up to him on New Year's Eve, and the most complete of the ceremonies to him is held by the blacksmiths and the locksmiths.

782 326 On New Year's Eve the master of the house kills either a calf or a ram, and his wife kills a rooster for each member of the family and prepares a pie of wheat-flour and fresh cheese. The livers and hearts of all the slaughtered animals are roasted separately; for this, instead of a spit, a stick from a young nut-tree is used. When the food is ready

/53 cont./

782 and has been brought into the smithy, the blacksmith puts
326 all his instruments on the anvil; a brazier with coals is placed nearby and the whole family kneels down around the anvil. After taking off his bashlyk and his belt (as proof that he addresses Shasha with an open heart and mind), the smith lights a wax candle, throws incense on the coals of the brazier, and prays to Shasha to bless him and his family with good health and long life, and to make the instruments forged from iron do him good rather than harm. After all those present have pronounced "Amen" at the end of the prayer, the master of the house cuts pieces of the pie and of the organs roasted on the nut-wood spit and throws them on the brazier with the words: "Until that time when I am unable /54/ to feed with these little pieces all Shervashidzi and Anchabadzi, let no one in my family fall ill. I pray to you for this, Shasha, bringing to you a real sacrifice." The smith then cuts off just such little pieces from the other sacrifices and distributes them to all the members of the family, who eat them and wash them down with three swallows
[273] of wine. The host designates the wine for this repast immediately after the harvesting of the grapes and saves it in a separate jug called shēsher gaphshi, buried in the smithy itself; under the fear of punishment by Shasha, no one dares to touch it, even in any extremity, before New Year's Eve, neither the host himself nor, all the more, one of the bystanders. Upon the completion of the praying, the prepared dishes are transferred to the house of the smith, where the neighbors gather and feast to the glory of Shasha until dawn.

782 Several princes also offer a prayer to Shasha on New
796 Year's Eve, in which case each of the persons present, having
565 been at one time dependent on these princes, brings a rooster. Shasha is one of those divinities called upon by the Abkhaz more often than others.

796 According to the understanding of the Abkhaz, the divinity whose name is called falsely immediately punishes the guilty one by those means or tools which are in the field of his specialty. Thus, for instance, one who has called

/54 cont./

776 falsely the name of Aphi, who commands the thunderstorms, cannot be punished by means of firearms or side arms, which make up the specialty of Shasha, etc.

782 326 Oaths to Shasha are of two kinds: in the smithy and under the open sky. In the first instance, the smith, having placed the hammer on the anvil and crossed his hands on his breast, stands to one side of it, the one swearing the oath on the other side of the anvil, opposite the smith, and the one concerning whose affairs the oath is being sworn stands to the side. The one swearing the oath, having taken the hammer into his hands, says: "If I am guilty of that of which they accuse me, then may Shasha smash open my head on the anvil"; upon these words, he hits the anvil three times with the hammer, and the oath is considered sworn. In the second 782 instance, two sticks are driven into the ground, one opposite the other; on them are hung loaded rifles whose muzzles are trained on the space occupied by the one swearing the oath; those present stand to the side. The one swearing the oath pronounces, "If I said a lie, may Shasha shoot bullets through my head /55/ from these rifles," and he walks through the space between the rifles three times.

755 782 326 [787] At the first sign of sickness accompanied by headaches, the person who has taken a false oath asks his relatives to find out from a female fortune-teller the cause of his ailment. The fortune-teller, who has usually heard beforehand, from the blacksmith himself about everyone who has taken an oath, throws some beans and looks at the stars, and then indicates the cause of the sickness: a false oath sworn to Shasha on such and such a day, in connection with such and such a matter, and in such and such a smithy. One of the ailing person's relatives goes to the person concerning whose affairs the false oath was sworn and by gifts induces him to pray to Shasha to forgive the patient, promising, of course, that upon recovery the patient will give him complete satisfaction. Then they both go to the smithy where the oath was taken, and the

/55 cont./

755 782 326 sick man's accuser, taking off his belt to bear witness to the sincerity of his address to Shasha, approaches the anvil and utters a prayer in which he requests Shasha to deliver the guilty one from his ailment, with a pledge that after his recovery the sick man will come himself to beg for forgiveness from Shasha; then, leaving a piece of iron in the smithy, he goes to set the patient's mind at reast. If the sick man recovers, he satisfies the injured one and goes with him to the smithy, and, having put a small silver coin (no less than two rubles) on the anvil, thanks Shasha for his recovery; the ram, the bread, and the wine that he has brought with him are given to the blacksmith, from whom, after the prayer, he receives pieces of the ram's liver and heart; he sends these to his family as a token of Shasha's forgiveness. In company with his relatives, the injured party, and the blacksmith, he himself eats the food that was brought along in the blacksmith's house.

21.

The Prayer to Eyrig-aatsnykh

679 782 [776] [778] Eyrig-aatsnykh is the patron of stealing, plundering, and robbery. Beyond the river Bzyb this deity is called Chugurukhnykh; all the Abkhaz setting out to steal among the Ubykh, Shapsug, and other mountain-dwellers used to bring offerings to Chugurukhnykh, whose altar, if this expression may be used here, /56/ was located on a cliff beyond the fortification of Gagra. Prayers to this god are offered only by those who practice the "arts" of which he is the patron. An offering of four cone-shaped loaves of bread is brought; a prayer is said over them, asking a blessing upon the enterprise and giving a promise to sacrifice something else to the god in case of success. The loaves of bread are taken along on the trip. The thank-offering consists of something of the stolen goods, and if a horse or a head of cattle is taken, the sacrifice consists of a lock of the stolen animal's hair;

[758 cont.]

Silversmiths and blacksmiths are almost the only artisans; the former occupied themselves earlier with the ornamentation of weapons in particular; the latter, of whom there are two or three in every village, make dagger blades, sickles, bits for horses, horseshoes, and the like. Among the Abkhaz their profession is particularly honored and esteemed (see p. 25 , cf. Africa).

In earlier times trade was based exclusively on barter. Before the incursion of the Russians (end of the eighteenth century), the Cherkess traded salt, among other things, to the Osset, bringing it on large, two-

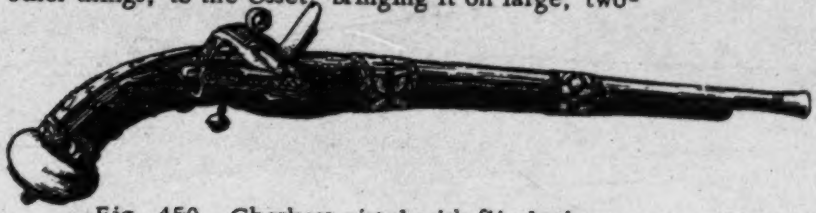

Fig. 450. Cherkess pistol with flintlock, bone pommel, and silver fittings (1/4 natural size) (Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg).

wheeled carts, drawn by six to eight oxen, from the salt-lakes along the Caspian Sea between Terek and Kuma. As products of their industry they sold principally wax, honey, skins, cloth, capes, and the like, as well as slaves. Linen material in pieces the size of a shirt served as a measure of value for all wares.

At that time the men, when not engaged in war, devoted themselves by preference to hunting and raiding. In order not to be understood by other people, and also to confuse the game, two kinds of secret language were used: the words in the one (šakobže) are completely different from the Cherkess language; in the other (farsipse) a ri or fe is inserted after every syllable.